



FACT SHEET

Local Court Assistance

In 1995, the Administrative Office of the Courts established a regional assistance program to provide information to courts, legislators, and the public on a regional basis. In 1999 the focus of this program shifted to the 38 smallest counties in California in response to changes resulting from the trial court funding and unification measures. While these measures presented significant opportunities for improvement in trial court systems statewide, they also produced new challenges unique to smaller, non-urban courts.

Small County Regions

California's 38 smallest counties are divided into two regions:

North Region: Butte, Colusa, Del Norte, Glenn, Humboldt, Lake, Lassen, Mendocino, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, and Yuba.

Central Region: Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, Imperial, Inyo, Kings, Madera, Marin, Mariposa, Merced, Mono, Napa, San Benito, San Luis Obispo, Santa Cruz, Tulare, Tuolumne, and Yolo.

Program Objectives

- Evaluate, in partnership with the courts, whether direct service, technical assistance, or regional assistance is the best approach to reducing costs and increasing efficiency for each area of management and business services. Develop an implementation plan to deliver these services—working groups, pilot courts, or task forces.
- Provide a forum in which the smaller courts can meet quarterly to share problems and concerns and create plans for improving communication, coordination, cooperation, and administration.
- Develop skills-based training programs to address specific court management needs, such as contract management and negotiations, facility management, and personnel management.
- Provide technical assistance to courts to establish and evaluate programs and procedures.
- Coordinate and manage pilot projects, conduct studies, and make recommendations to meet the goals in the small courts in a way that is consistent with the Judicial Council's policies and goals.
- Provide technical assistance for administrative policies and procedures and develop guidelines and model contracts.
- Mediate contractual agreements between the courts and the counties as needed.
- Establish an online resource directory to provide information to courts electronically, such as listings of trainings, consultants, and contractors that are available to local courts.

Small Counties Meetings

To respond to the unique demands of each jurisdiction and to address transition issues under the trial court funding and trial court unification measures, AOC staff set up the first in a continuing series of meetings with presiding judges and court executives from small counties. These meetings (held three times a year) enable officials of small courts to discuss and resolve common issues, one of the program goals. The court executives and judges who attend these meetings have presented issues and requests for assistance in areas such as human resource management, risk management and indemnification, labor relations, facilities, technology, and judicial benefits. The AOC will assist the courts by serving as a resource for developing standards and guidelines.

Program Activities

In response to issues outlined by small counties, AOC staff has provided outreach and technical assistance, including the following:

1. Establishment of a court fellow program that enables former court executives to directly assist smaller courts in developing budgets, rectifying historical underfunding, and managing unanticipated costs. A court fellow makes regular site visits and provides assistance as requested.
2. In January 2000, a working group undertook a review of memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and county A87s—an allocation process whereby courts are charged for services provided by counties—in order to make recommendations concerning agreements with counties. Negotiation assistance will be available upon request.
3. Provision of insurance coverage for judges and commissioners whose actions are brought before the Commission on Judicial Performance.
4. Establishment of computer system user groups and development of computer case management and fiscal systems.
5. Dissemination of court interpreter lists by region and lists of labor relations consultants.

Small County Mini-Grants

State funds in the amount of \$125,000 were made available to enhance efforts in the transition to court unification and state funding. Small counties were encouraged to apply for funding, particularly on a regional or multiple-county basis.